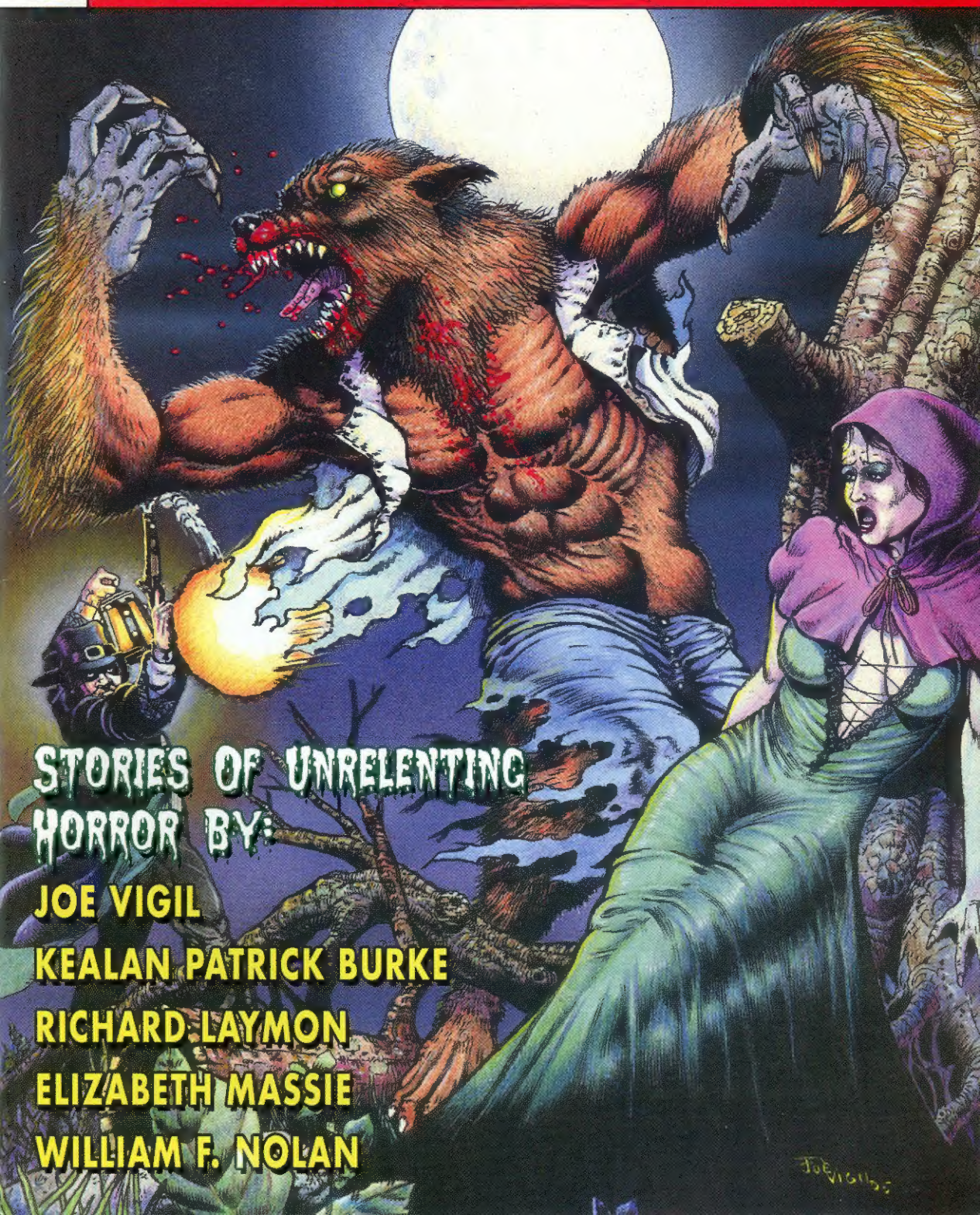
HORROR

#5

CEMETERY DANCE PRESENTS

$3.95

GRAVE TALES



STORIES OF UNRELENTING HORROR BY:

JOE VIGIL

KEALAN PATRICK BURKE

RICHARD LAYMON

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Associate Editor

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CEMETERY DANCE PRESENTS

GRAVE TALES #5

VOLUME THREE, ISSUE ONE

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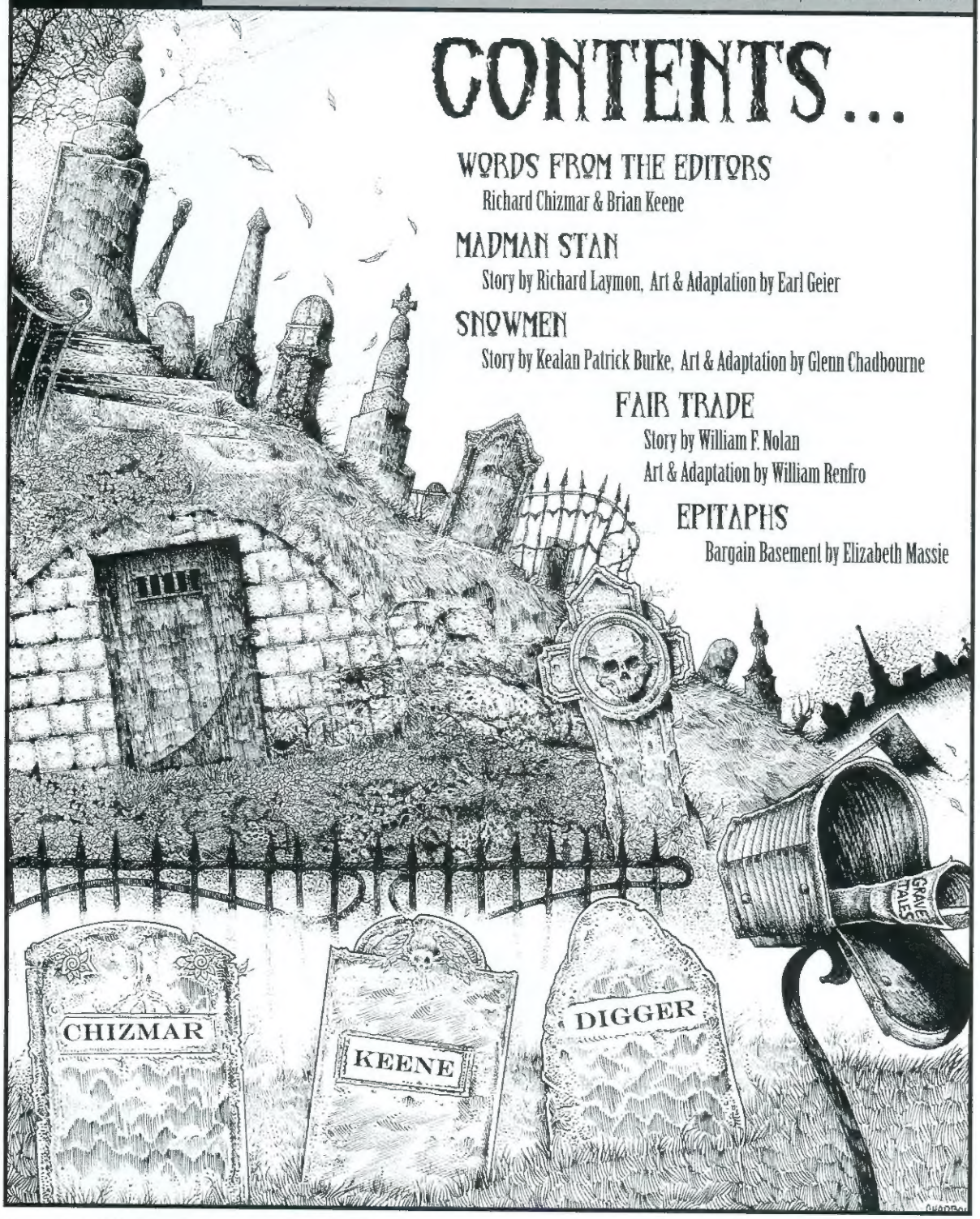
WORDS FROM THE EDITORS
Richard Chizmar & Brian Keene

MADMAN STAN
Story by Richard Laymon, Art & Adaptation by Earl Geier

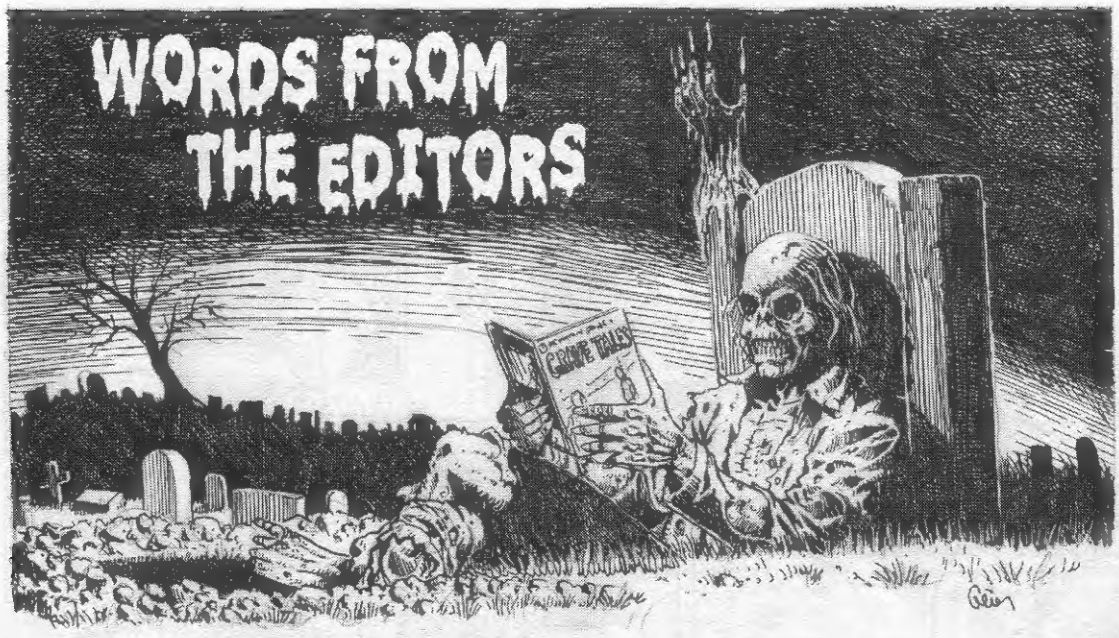
SNOWMEN
Story by Kealan Patrick Burke, Art & Adaptation by Glenn Chadbourne

FAIR TRADE
Story by William F. Nolan
Art & Adaptation by William Renfro

EPITAPHS
Bargain Basement by Elizabeth Massie



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Welcome to another issue of *Grave Tales*. Issue #5 has been a long time coming—for a variety of reasons—but I'm happy to report that we're back on track and excited about the future. Issue #6 is already at the printer and will feature amazing work by Joe Hill, Ray Garton, and Robert Morrish.

As for the issue you are holding in your hands...we have great comic stories inside from horror legends Richard Laymon and William F. Nolan, as well as rising star Kealan Patrick Burke. Toss in a killer short story from Elizabeth Massie and stunning artwork from a slew of *Grave Tales* regulars and I promise that *GT#5* is well worth the wait!

One final note before I hand you over to my co-editor Brian Keene: I lost my father to cancer in 2007. My father bought me my first comic book when I was a kid. He took me to the library at least once a week. He always had an extra couple bucks so I could visit the bookstore or the magazine shop. He's the reason I am an editor and a writer and a publisher. Thanks, Dad. I miss you.

—Richard Chizmar

Brian Keene here. Reading Rich's heartfelt tribute to his father has filled me with a sense of nostalgia. My Dad also used to buy me comics, back when they were 'Still Only 35 Cents!' (old-school Marvel fans will remember that logo). We went to the newsstand every week, and Dad would get a few cigars and some chewing tobacco for himself, and two or three comics and a paperback for me (sometimes he'd let me have a bit of the chewing tobacco—just don't tell my Mom).

One thing that perplexed me back then was why my favorite comics weren't always on the rack. I was too young to understand the vagaries of the publishing business. I didn't know about monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, and annual schedules, and how those schedules could be impacted by the smallest factors. All I knew is that my old man was willing to buy me the latest issue of *The Defenders* or *Kamandi,* but they weren't on the rack, and instead, I ended up with frigging *Beetle Bailey.*

Of course, as an adult, I know all too well how this business works, and I know there's been a long delay between issue #4 and this one. Suffice to say, we appreciate your patience and are positive you'll find it was worth the wait. We've got some good things lined up, and the best is yet to come!

—Brian Keene


Madman Stan
Adapted by
EARL GEIER
Based on the short story by
RICHARD LAYMON
Lettered by SUSAN DORNE
HEY!
CLICK
SHE CAN'T DO THAT!
NO FAIR!
THE SHOW WASN'T EVEN OVER!
IT IS NOW!
TIME FOR BEDDY BYE.
BILLY AND I ARE ALLOWED TO STAY UP 'TIL ELEVEN ON SATURDAY NIGHTS, AGNES.
IT ISN'T EVEN TEN YET.
CHILDREN YOUR AGE BELONG IN BED AT A DECENT HOUR.
IF I MAY SPEAK MY MIND--
THAT REALLY BITES!
MOM AND DAD LET US STAY UP.
SO DOES LINDA.
WELL, LINDA HAD A DATE!
AND I'M A LITTLE SICK OF HEARING ABOUT THAT LINDA TWIT!
I'M LOSING MY PATIENCE, CHILDREN.
OFF TO BED WITH YOU, NOW!
YOU'RE REALLY A ROTTEN BABYSITTER, AGNES.
WHY, THANK YOU.
AND YOU, MY DEARIE, ARE A REALLY ROTTEN CHILD.
COME ON, BILLY. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.
OH, DON'T GO AWAY MAD!
COME BACK.
I'VE GOT A LITTLE SURPRISE --
SOMETHING TO CHEER YOU UP.
WHAT?


A BEDTIME STORY.
A SCARY ONE!
YOU WANT TO HEAR IT, DON'T YOU?
YEAH, I GUESS SO.
WHY DON'T WE TURN OFF THE LIGHTS?
NO, BILLY'S AFRAID OF THE DARK.
YOU LYING SACK! AM NOT!
NOT MUCH.
I GUESS I DON'T WANT TO BE IN A DARK ROOM WITH AGNES, ANYWAY.
WE'LL LEAVE THE LIGHTS ON, THEN.
COME SIT NEXT TO ME.
OH YEAH, RIGHT.
THIS IS HOW WE ALWAYS SIT.
YOU'RE NOT FRIGHTENED OF ME, ARE YOU?
NO. NOT MUCH.
BUT YOU'RE FAT AND UGLY AND SMELL LIKE A MOLDY WASH CLOTH.
THIS IS HOW WE ALWAYS SIT.
I DIDN'T RELISH THE IDEA MYSELF --
--YOU TWO DARLINGS UP HERE WITH ME.
I'D BETTER NOT LAUGH. IT MIGHT MAKE HER MAD.
Hmmph.
ALL RIGHT.
I'M SURPRISED SHE CAN CROSS HER LEGS WITHOUT THE PANTS SPLITTING OPEN.
NO, WE'LL URINATE LATER.
ARE YOU READY FOR THE STORY?
MAYBE YOU NEED TO WEE-WEE FIRST?
THIS IS THE STORY OF WHY NOBODY GOES TO BED AT NIGHT WITHOUT LOCKING UP.
IN SOME TOWNS, PEOPLE DON'T.


BUT WE ALWAYS DO, HERE IN OAKWOOD. THERE'S A GOOD REASON FOR THAT.
IT'S BECAUSE OF THE MADMAN.
MADMAN STAN.
"NOBODY KNOWS WHERE HE COMES FROM. BUT HE HANGS AROUND THE CEMETERY. ESPECIALLY ON HOT SUMMER NIGHTS."
"HE LIKES TO TAKE OFF HIS CLOTHES AND RUB AGAINST THE TOMBSTONES."
"THEY'RE COOL, YOU KNOW."
RICH DOESN'T BELIEVE HER.
I DON'T EITHER... I THINK...
"I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM AMONG THE GRAVES."
"BUT I'VE HEARD THAT'S WHERE HE TAKES HIS VICTIMS."
MADMAN STAN WILL SETTLE FOR ADULTS. AND HE LIKES LITTLE GIRLS.
BUT MOST OF ALL HE LIKES LITTLE BOYS!
AND SOMETIMES, DIGGING SOUNDS.
FOLKS BY THE GRAVEYARD SAY THEY HEAR SCREAMS SOMETIME.
YOU'RE MAKING THIS UP.
I WISH RICH WOULDN'T EGG HER ON.
I'VE NEVER SEEN MADMAN STAN BY THE GRAVEYARD.
BUT I'VE SEEN HIM OTHER PLACES.
ONCE, WALKING HOME AT NIGHT AFTER A SITTING JOB, I SAW HIM, RIGHT HERE, ON FIFTH STREET.
HE WAS WALKING FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, TO EACH DOOR, TRYING THE KNOBS.
HE WAS LOOKING FOR AN UNLOCKED DOOR.
AND WHEN HE FINDS ONE, IN HE'LL GO.
AND THAT'S THE LAST FOR SOMEONE.


NOW. OFF TO BED, CHILDREN
THAT'S ALL?
THAT'S NO STORY!
THAT'S MY STORY!
I WANT YOU TO GO STRAIGHT TO SLEEP.
AND IF I HEAR SO MUCH AS A PEEP OUT OF YOU...
I'LL UNLOCK THE FRONT DOOR.
RICH?
SHUT UP!
IT'S NOT TRUE, IS IT?
DON'T BE A DORK.
SHE WAS JUST TRYING TO SCARE US.
YOU SURE?
THERE'S NO MADMAN GOING AROUND, TRYING DOOR KNOBS.
THE COPS'D BE ALL OVER A GUY LIKE THAT.
AND WE'D OF HEARD IF PEOPLE WERE DISAPPEARING.
I SUPPOSE...
SO FORGET--
AAHHH
WHAT DID I TELL YOU CHILDREN ABOUT TALKING?!
WE WEREN'T --
I'M NOT DEAF, SWEETIE-PIE!

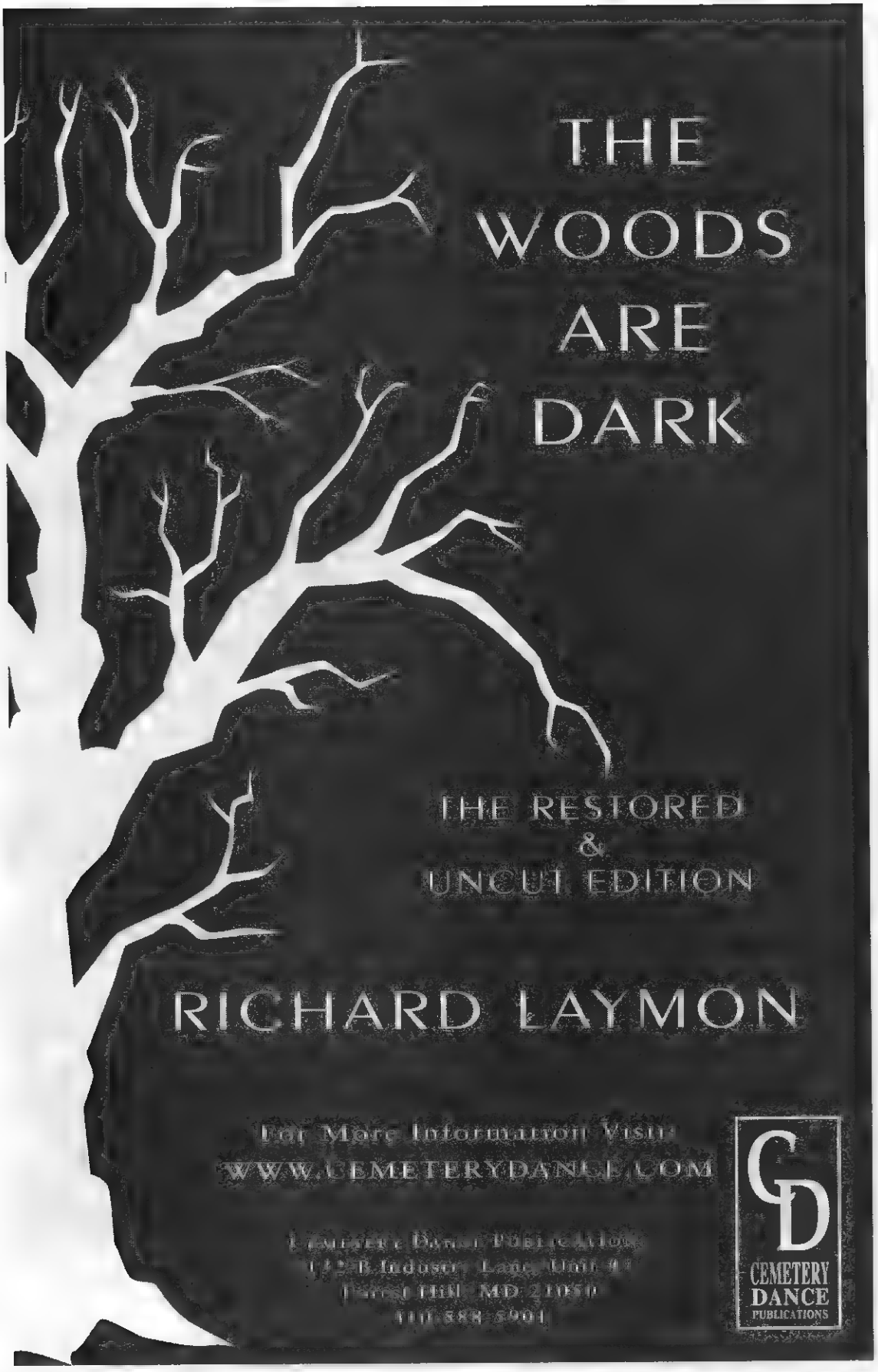

I TOLD YOU WHAT I'D DO!
AND I AIM TO DO JUST THAT!
I WON'T CRY! I WON'T!
I WONDER IF I'LL BE ABLE TO HEAR AGNES UNLOCKING THE DOOR.
IT'S AWFULLY FAR AWAY...
SNIF SNIF
RICH?
ARE YOU CRYING?
NOW SHE'S GONE AND UNLOCKED THE DOOR!
NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!
IT'S YOUR FAULT!
WHY'D YOU HAVE TO GO AND OPEN YOUR BIG MOUTH?
YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T BELIEVE IN MADMAN STAN!?
I DON'T!
THEN WHY ARE YOU CRYING?
I'M NOT!
IT'S JUST..
SHE'S SUCH A BITCH!
SNIF
NOW COULD MOM AND DAD LEAVE US WITH HER?!
LINDA HAD A DATE...
SHUT UP, BEFORE SHE COMES BACK!
RICH IS MORE SCARED THAN ME! AND HE DOESN'T EVEN BELIEVE IN MADMAN STAN!
'BET HE DOES BELIEVE!
RICH?
YOU ASLEEP?


RICH SHOULDN'T LEAVE ME ALONE LIKE THIS!
I WISH I COULD FALL ASLEEP.
MY BED'S CLOSEST TO THE DOOR.
WHEN MADMAN STAN COMES, HE'LL GET ME FIRST!
MAYBE WE COULD SNEAK OUT THE WINDOW AND ESCAPE!
BUT IF WE DO, WE'LL BE OUTSIDE, WHERE HE IS!
I COULD HIDE UNDER THE BED.
THAT'S PROBABLY THE FIRST PLACE HE'D LOOK!
AND IF I HIDE, HE MIGHT GET RICH INSTEAD!
HE TEASES ME ALOT, AND STARTS FIGHTS. BUT SOMETIMES HE'S OKAY.
I DON'T WANT MADMAN STAN TO GET HIM AND TAKE HIM TO THE GRAVEYARD.
IF MADMAN STAN DOES COME, HE'LL GET AGNES FIRST!
BET SHE DIDN'T UNLOCK THE DOOR AT ALL.
I KNOW SHE LIED ABOUT THAT!
I JUST WISH I COULD BE SURE...
RICH CALLED HER A BITCH!
HE'D BE IN TROUBLE IF MOM AND DAD FOUND OUT.
SHE IS A BITCH.
WHAT'LL I DO IF SHE SEES ME?
THE TV'S NOT ON.
WHAT'S SHE DOING, READING OR SOMETHIN'?
MOM AND DAD'VE CAUGHT US UNDER THE TABLE WHEN RICH AND I TRY TO WATCH LATE TV.
BUT PLENTY OF TIMES THEY DIDN'T.


O-KAY!
WAIT'LL I TELL RICH!
SHE'S SLEEPING!
"YOU WHAT?!"
"I JUST CRAWLED OVER AND MADE SURE THE DOOR WAS LOCKED."
"WITH AGNES RIGHT THERE?! WOW, BILLY, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD THE GUTS!"
"WASN'T A BIG DEAL."
"WAS SHE ASLEEP OR SOMETHING?"
"I DON'T KNOW, SHE COULD'VE BEEN PLAYING POSSUM, I GUESS."
WHAT IF SHE'S PLAYING POSSUM?!
SHE'S BREATHING SLOW...
SHE'S ASLEEP.
I THINK!
IF ONLY I COULD BE SURE!
CRRKK
UH- HER HAND!
SHE'S AWAKE! SHE--
JUST HER HAND...

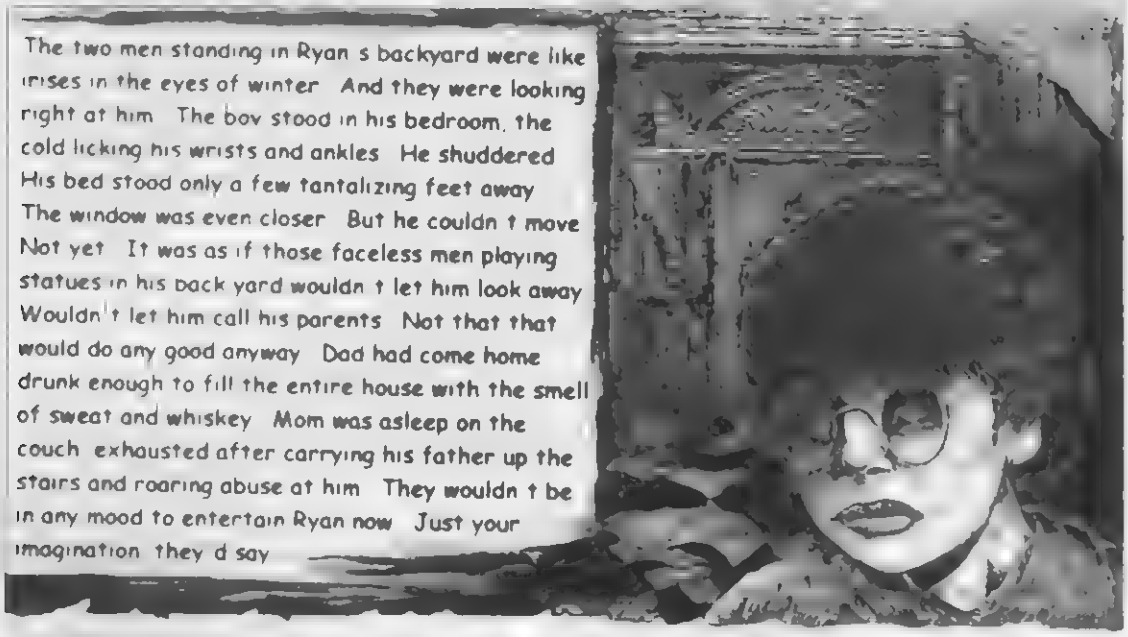

THERE IT IS!
THE CATCH IS STRAIGHT UP AND DOWN BUT IT ALWAYS IS
YOU CAN'T TELL IF IT'S LOCKED OR NOT--
--WITHOUT TRYING THE KNOB
WHAT IF MADMAN STAN'S RIGHT OUTSIDE?!
WHAT IF HE'S REACHING FOR THE KNOB -- RIGHT NOW?!
IT'S LOCKED!
THE DIRTY PIG HADN'T UNLOCKED IT AFTER ALL!
GOD, I WAS SCARED!
BUT I DID IT!
I DID IT AND SHE DIDN'T CATCH ME
I DID IT!


BAM BAM BAM
AHHHH
YAAAA
BILLY?! RICH?!
WHAT'S GOING ON?!
IT'S DAD! AND MOM!
THEY'RE OKAY, HONEY
OH, THANK GOD!
WHAT'S GOING ON?!
WHY'D YOU BLOCK THE DOOR?
AGNES WAS HORRIBLE, DAD! SHE--
WHERE IS SHE?
HOW COULD SHE GO OFF AND LEAVE YOU?
WE COME HOME, THE GODDAM SITTER'S GONE, AND THE FRONT DOOR'S WIDE OPEN!
WHAT HAPPENED?
MOM'S GOT AGNES' GLASSES!
MADMAN STAN GOT HER!
SHE UNLOCKED THE DOOR SO HE'D GET US! BUT HE GOT HER!
SHE UNLOCKED THE DOOR!
I'D BETTER NOT SAY WHO REALLY UNLOCKED THE DOOR...
End


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Snowmen

The two men standing in Ryan s backyard were like irises in the eyes of winter And they were looking right at him The boy stood in his bedroom, the cold licking his wrists and ankles He shuddered His bed stood only a few tantalizing feet away The window was even closer But he couldn t move Not yet It was as if those faceless men playing statues in his back yard wouldn t let him look away Wouldn t let him call his parents Not that that would do any good anyway Dad had come home drunk enough to fill the entire house with the smell of sweat and whiskey Mom was asleep on the couch exhausted after carrying his father up the stairs and roaring abuse at him They wouldn t be in any mood to entertain Ryan now Just your imagination they d say







But it wasn't his imagination Nor a dream. He had blinked his eyes once, twice, three times He'd pinched his arm hard enough to force him into stifling a yelp--there would be an angry red welt there tomorrow. He'd gone to the bathroom to pee and splashed cold water on his face . . and when he'd returned they were still there. Two of them One large, one small. Faces in shadow, staring at him. He knew they were staring at him, could feel their eyes on him It was snowing again now but that didn't seem to bother them. They simply stood, unmoving, watching him with fierce interest. Waiting for something maybe. But what?

Again he thought of rousing his parents So what if they didn't believe him or were angry? At least he wouldn't be alone. At least then he could drag them in here and let them see for themselves that he wasn't lying, or imagining things. But would the men still be there?

Courage bloomed in him like a warm flower and he willed his legs to move In a heartbeat he was padding across the cold floor He yanked the door open and the narrow hallway beyond yawned into view His father was closest so he hurried down the hall to his parent's bedroom and tapped once on the door--a matter of formality-- then entered the room





And stalled on the threshold, halted by memory His eyes searched the dark finally straining the shape of a bed from the meager light spilling in from the hall An uncertain pale oblong held the crumpled shape of a wild-haired shadow, open mouthed Gasping and gurgling Gasping and gurgling



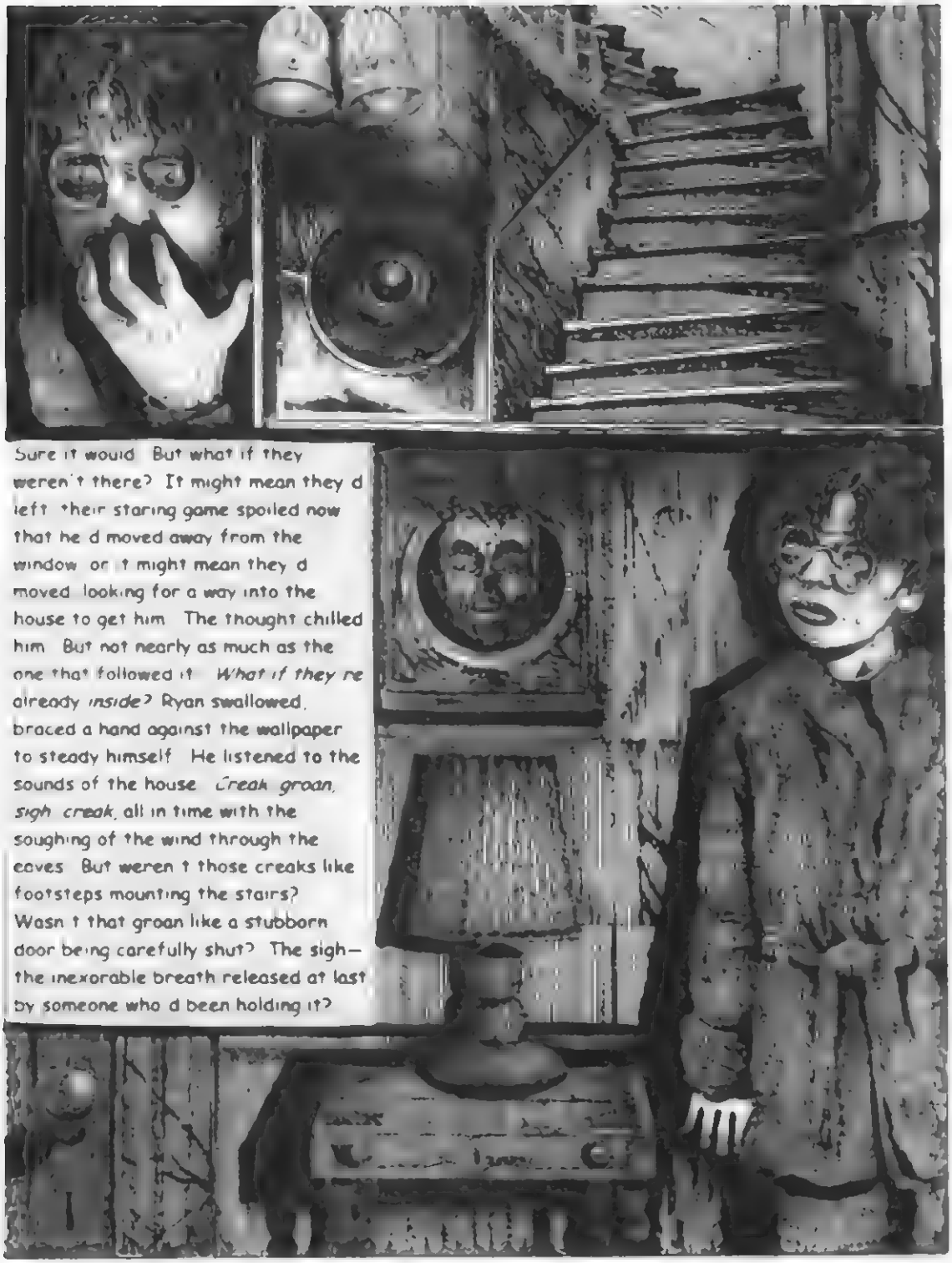



Make me add a you little bastard and I'll break your neck
Can't make him Ryan thought fearful On his cheek the latent print of an old wound rose like a submarine from the deep and brought a flush to his skin The sound it brought echoing inside his skull was a mere whisper but the remembered threat was enough
There was not a doubt in his mind that his father loved him (even if he never said as much) and would never intentionally lay a hand on his son But when he was drunk he changed Became possessed He was a monster who forgot the people who shared his cave and lashed out at them as if they sought to invade his territory He hurt them then wept in the morning when he saw what he d done A broken finger a bleeding nose a cut cheek A broken heart

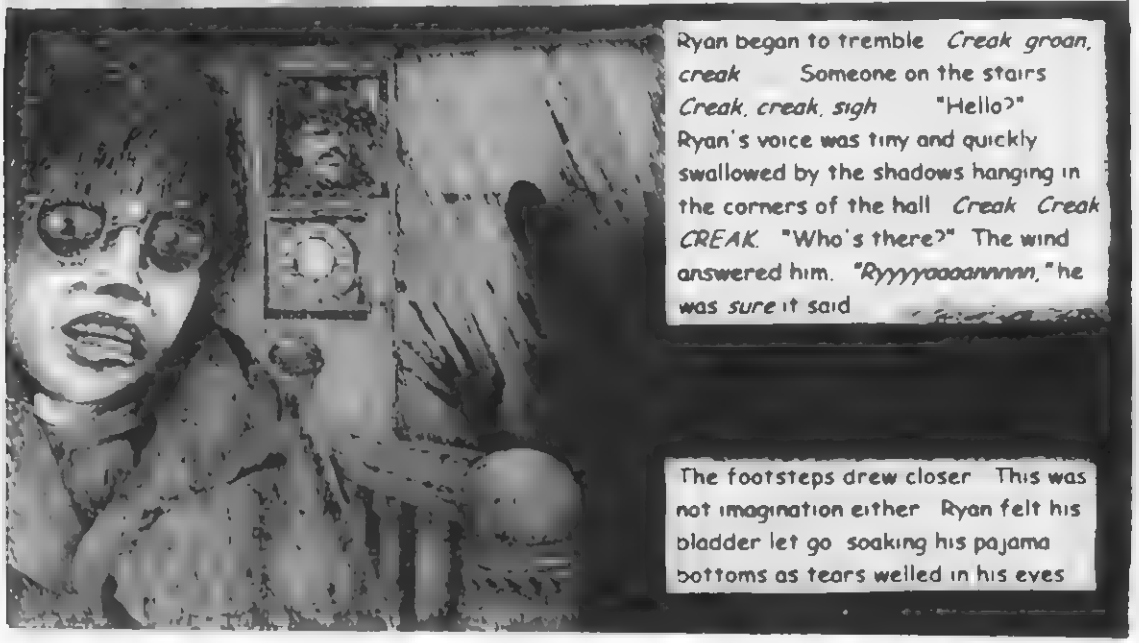


No. Suddenly afraid his presence would be enough to rouse the sleeping man Ryan eased stealthily back wincing in time with the creak and groan of the floorboards. He paused once more on the threshold listening. The shape on the bed shuddered fell silent. Ryan's heart stopped. He waited hair prickling for a sleep muddled grumble. "*Whhhhat re you doing*[illegible]*here dunnnn?*" But it did not come. He slowly turned the knob and shut the door without a sound. Safe. What had he been thinking. Dad was a mean drunk. Worse when roused from sleeping it off. Ryan's breath whistled through his nose as he approached his bedroom. The door was opposite the stairs and now indecision cut through him. Wouldn't it be wise to check and make sure the men were still there before trying to wake his mother?




Sure it would. But what if they weren't there? It might mean they'd left their staring game spoiled now that he'd moved away from the window, or it might mean they'd moved, looking for a way into the house to get him. The thought chilled him. But not nearly as much as the one that followed it. *What if they're already inside?* Ryan swallowed, braced a hand against the wallpaper to steady himself. He listened to the sounds of the house. *Creak, groan, sigh, creak,* all in time with the soughing of the wind through the eaves. But weren't those creaks like footsteps mounting the stairs? Wasn't that groan like a stubborn door being carefully shut? The sigh—the inexorable breath released at last by someone who'd been holding it?

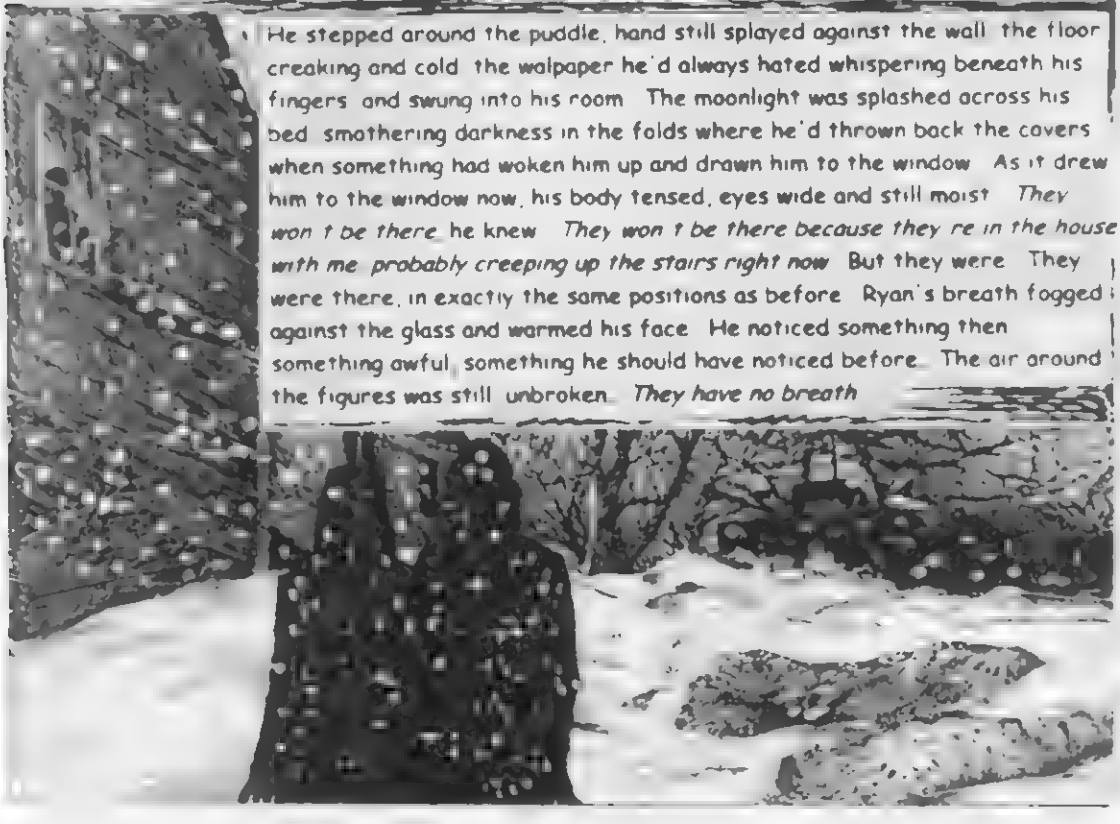



Ryan began to tremble *Creak groan, creak* Someone on the stairs *Creak, creak, sigh* "Hello?" Ryan's voice was tiny and quickly swallowed by the shadows hanging in the corners of the hall *Creak Creak CREAK.* "Who's there?" The wind answered him. *"Ryyyyaaaannnnn,"* he was *sure* it said
The footsteps drew closer This was not imagination either Ryan felt his bladder let go soaking his pajama bottoms as tears welled in his eyes

Not imagined on at all and that was unfortunate for at that moment the lights flickered just as the maker of those creaking sounds reached the top of the stairs and stepped onto the landing. Lights buzzed. Shadows leaped. But the hallway was empty. And from his father's bedroom, the suddenly reassuring sound of a hacking cough quickly became a gurgling snore once more. Shivering, Ryan looked down at the puddle between his feet. He would have to clean it up before he got in trouble, but that could wait. He was already in trouble, but this kind of trouble was the very worst kind. The kind of trouble where you're not sure who's after you or why. All you know is that they are



He stepped around the puddle, hand still splayed against the wall, the floor creaking and cold, the wallpaper he'd always hated whispering beneath his fingers, and swung into his room. The moonlight was splashed across his bed, smothering darkness in the folds where he'd thrown back the covers when something had woken him up and drawn him to the window. As it drew him to the window now, his body tensed, eyes wide and still moist. *They won't be there*, he knew. *They won't be there because they're in the house with me, probably creeping up the stairs right now.* But they were. They were there, in exactly the same positions as before. Ryan's breath fogged against the glass and warmed his face. He noticed something then, something awful, something he should have noticed before. The air around the figures was still unbroken. *They have no breath.*

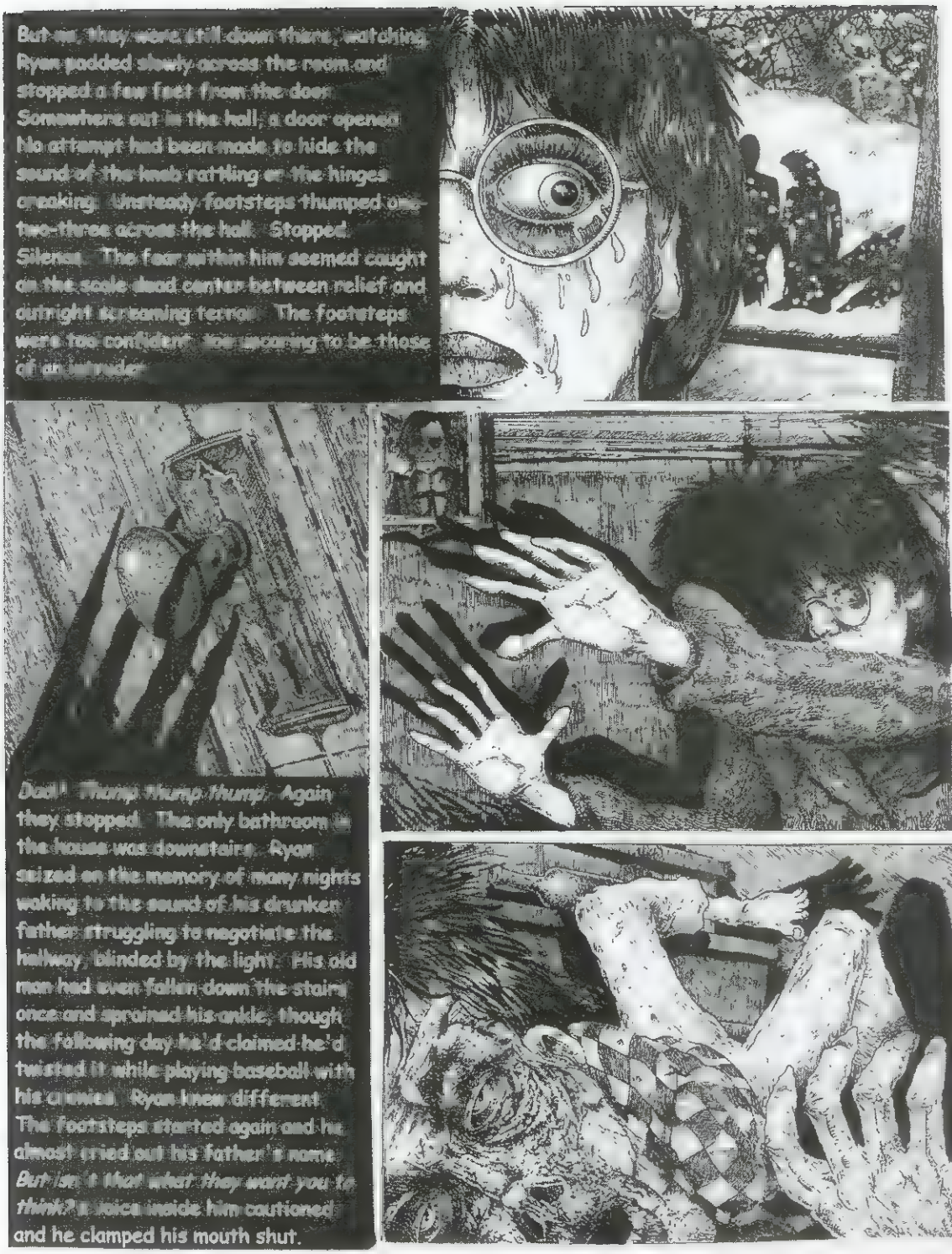




A noise in the hall made him jump *Creak Creak Thump* Ryan started to turn And one of the men in the yard moved Ryan gasped The move had been slight So slight he almost hadn't caught it The one on the right had tilted his head at him as if confused by his actions or the lack of them But as much as it seemed he had to he couldn't dwell on that now Because this time there was *definitely* someone out in the hall The creaking of the floorboards he could have explained away as the same phantom walker he'd imagined on the stairs but the thump could be nothing but a footfall

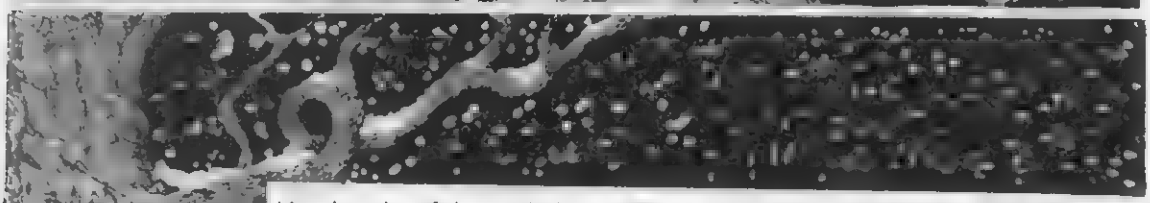
Thump There it was again Heart hammering madly Ryan cast a quick glance over his shoulder almost expecting to see the people in the yard had risen up and were leering at him their dead faces pressed against the glass




But no, they were still down there, watching.
Ryan padded slowly across the room and stopped a few feet from the door.
Somewhere out in the hall, a door opened. No attempt had been made to hide the sound of the knob rattling or the hinges creaking. Unsteady footsteps thumped one-two-three across the hall. Stopped. Silence. The fear within him seemed caught on the scale dead center between relief and outright screaming terror. The footsteps were too confident, too assuring to be those of an intruder.
Dad! Thump thump thump. Again they stopped. The only bathroom in the house was downstairs. Ryan seized on the memory of many nights waking to the sound of his drunken father struggling to negotiate the hallway, blinded by the light. His old man had even fallen down the stairs once and sprained his ankle, though the following day he'd claimed he'd twisted it while playing baseball with his cronies. Ryan knew different.
The footsteps started again and he almost cried out his father's name.
But isn't that what they want you to think? a voice inside him cautioned, and he clamped his mouth shut.

You've seen two of them down there. Who says there isn't a third? What if that was another one of them out there, pretending to be his father? Trying to coax him out by fooling him into feeling safe? But the footsteps . . . They'd come from up the hall, from the direction of his parents' room and not the stairs. You were asleep. One of them might have crept into your father's room. He hadn't thought of that. Call for Mom. Yes. That was it. That was the thing to do. But wait. What if that was one of them out there. Wouldn't calling Mom lure her right into his arms?





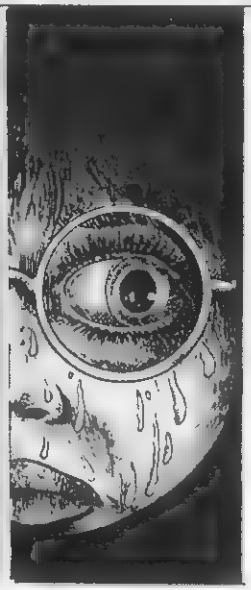
His thoughts felt tangled, confusion overwhelming him until he found himself crying again. Soundlessly. *Why is this happening? Thump, thump, thump, thump, THUMP!* The footsteps jerked him to attention and he hastily wiped the tears away with his sleave and focused on the door. Something grazed the hallway wall. Close. The thumping stopped. Ryan's gaze fell to the light beneath the door. Twin shadows in the amber light, cast by the feet of whoever was standing there.



"Dad?" he whispered Quiet, but for the wind hushing the night. "Daddy?" he repeated and almost screamed, almost died of fright when an answer came "Ryyannn?" The boy stepped forward, then back, his arm outstretched, uncertainty making a dance out of his movements. *It's a trick! They're trying to trick you!* But how could he be sure? *Don't open that door! They'll get you!* But what if it was his father, squinting at the door wondering what the hell was going on? Wondering if he'd imagined hearing his son's voice. Then he'd leave, go downstairs or back to bed. Leaving Ryan alone again. And that couldn't happen. "Ryyyaannnnn? That youuuuu?"







The boy was at the door before he could change his mind. Sobbing now, ignoring the ripple of fear that passed over him, Ryan tugged the door open. The light blazed in his eyes, momentarily making a hunched shadow of the thing standing there. A noxious odor rolled across the threshold. The voice inside him fell silent. Then a board creaked as the shadow moved forward a step. "Ryan? What the hell's goin' on? Why you up?" The tears came in a torrent Ryan was helpless to stop as he rushed forward and wrapped his arms around his father's waist, almost sending both of them sprawling.

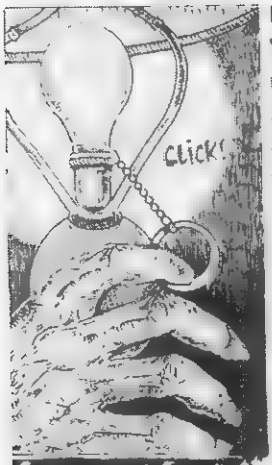


"Ryan? Hey! What s " Large muscular arms pried him loose and his father squinted down at him through eyes so full of red veins Ryan was amazed he could see through them. "What the hell s the matter with you? Why are you crying?" "The win—" Ryan started to say then wiped his eyes and rushed back into the bedroom. No. He had to check. The very worst thing that could happen now would be for him to tell Dad everything only to have the creatures in the yard vanish like they were spposed to. Like they did in the movies.

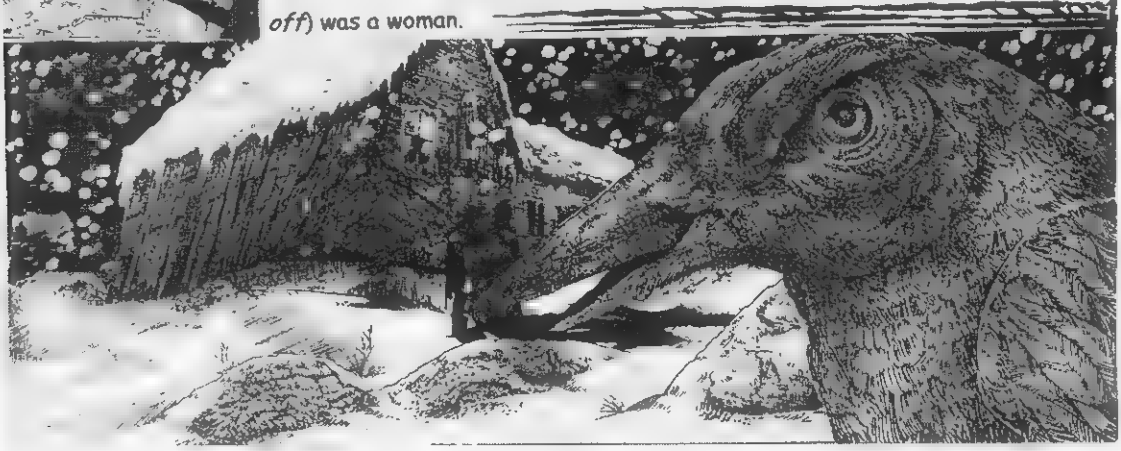




Everything was all right, Ryan realized, a surge of confidence brewing in his chest. Daddy was here now and even monsters with no breath would think twice before crossing his father. With the foul stink from the man clinging to him, a smell he now found infinitely comforting, Ryan closed his eyes and leaned forward to look out the window. *Please be there. Please be there.* Please.



Ryan opened his eyes. And grinned triumphantly. Relief swelled over him. "There's someone in the yard. Come look. They've been watching me all night. Two of them. They're not supposed to be there, are they Daddy? And they're not breathing!" A weary sigh from behind him, followed by a click as his father switched on the light, casting a yellow oblong out onto the thick white snow beneath his window. "There they are. Come look!" Ryan said, narrowing his eyes, unable to stem the excitement now that his lonely night of terror was over. Whatever those things down there had come for, they wouldn't get it now. He looked down and pointed at the two figures, now bathed in hazy light. And froze. Even from here he could see the mistake he'd made in the beginning thinking there were two men down there. There weren't. Nor were they the wicked monsters of his imaginings. One of them was a woman. The one with the tilted head (*because it's coming off*) was a woman.

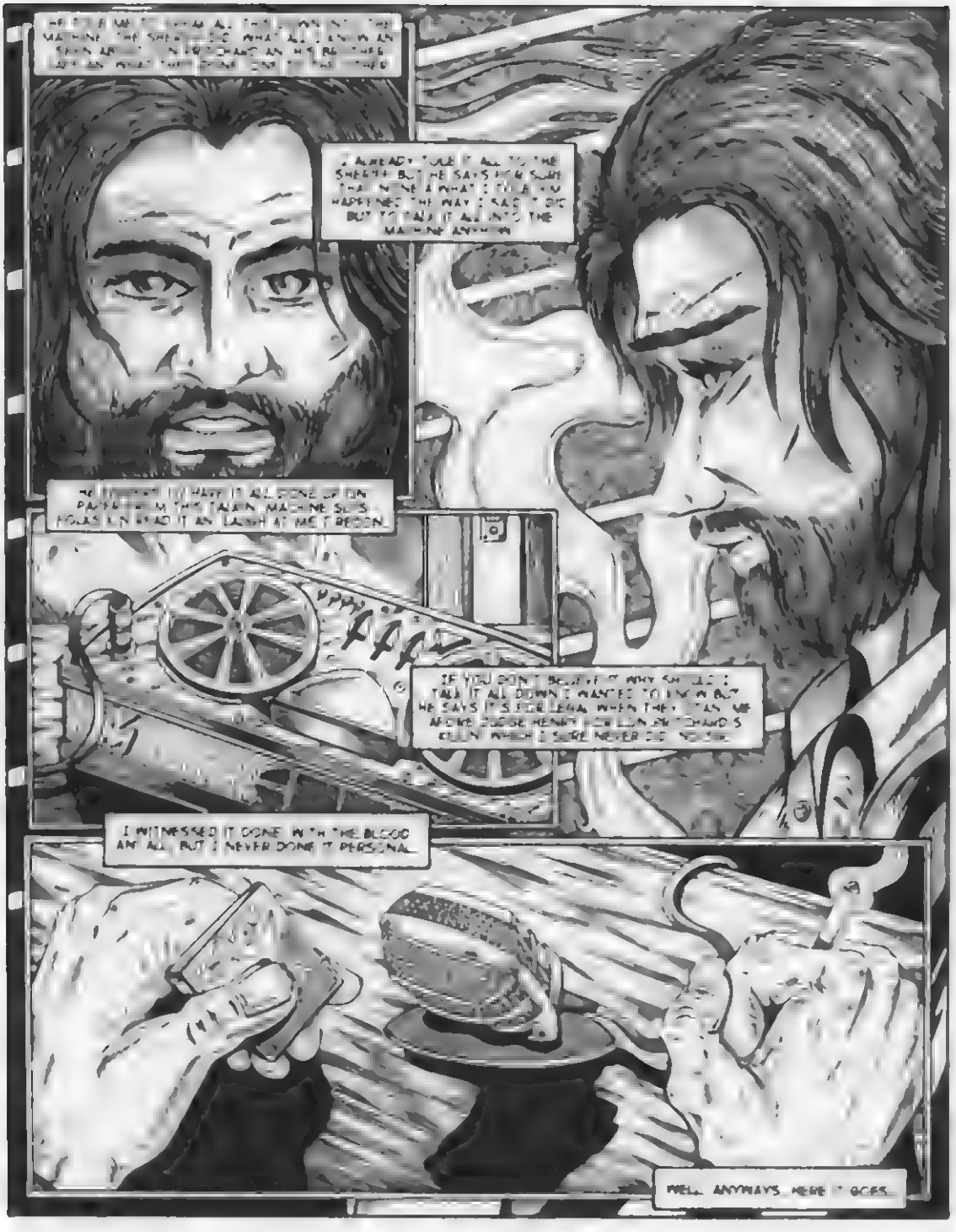




His mother. Glittering in the light. Ice forming a skin over her body, holding her in place, holding her still and firmly planted in the mound of snow at her feet. "Ryan. What are you doing?" Ryan began to tremble, a whine building in his throat, trapped there with all hope of a scream. Daddy sounded as if he needed to clear his throat. Daddy's reflection grew bigger in the window. Beneath which, another version of Daddy, the *real* Daddy, stood in his very own mound of snow, arms pinned to his sides, skin alive with crystals, mouth open and filled with snow. Staring. The shadow filled the window, draping darkness over the figures frozen below. Ryan watched it, allowing his eyes to meet the reflection of the liquid blue sparks hovering just above his head. Gasping and gurgling, a sound he had mistaken for his father's snoring. He now realized it had been nothing so innocent. As icicles met his skin and darkness filled his eyes, all awareness of pain and death swept away from him, leaving him with one single shred of a thought. That in the morning there would be three figures in the garden.






I ALREADY TOLD IT ALL TO THE SHERIFF BUT HE SAYS HE'S SURE THAT NONE A WHAT I TOLD HIM HAPPENED THE WAY I SAID IT DID BUT TO TELL IT ALL INTO THE MACHINE ANYHOW
HE WANTS ME TO HAVE IT ALL DOWN SO HIS PAL'S IN THE TALKIN MACHINE SUIT'S FOLKS CAN READ IT AN LAUGH AT ME I RECON.
IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IT WHY SHOULD I TAKE IT ALL DOWN I WANTED TO LIE IN BUT HE SAYS IT'S JUST LEGAL WHEN THEY TAKIN ME AFORE JUDGE HENRY FOR LIVIN AN' CHANGO'S KILLIN WHICH I SURE NEVER DID YOU SEE
I WITNESSED IT DONE IN TH' THE BLOOD AN' ALL BUT I NEVER DONE IT PERSONAL
WELL ANYWAYS HERE IT GOES


FAIR TRADE
ORIGINAL STORY BY WILLIAM F. NOLAN
ADAPTED AND ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM A. RENFRO
I DON'T RECALL FEVER HAD NO BLOOD KINFOLK
I RUN AWAY AND GROWED JUST AS BEST I COULD
DON'T MATTER NOHOW TO THIS STORY, 'CEPT THAT'S WHY I SAW WHAT I DID LYIN' OUT IN DEEP WOODS LIKE I DO
IT'S A FUNNY THING



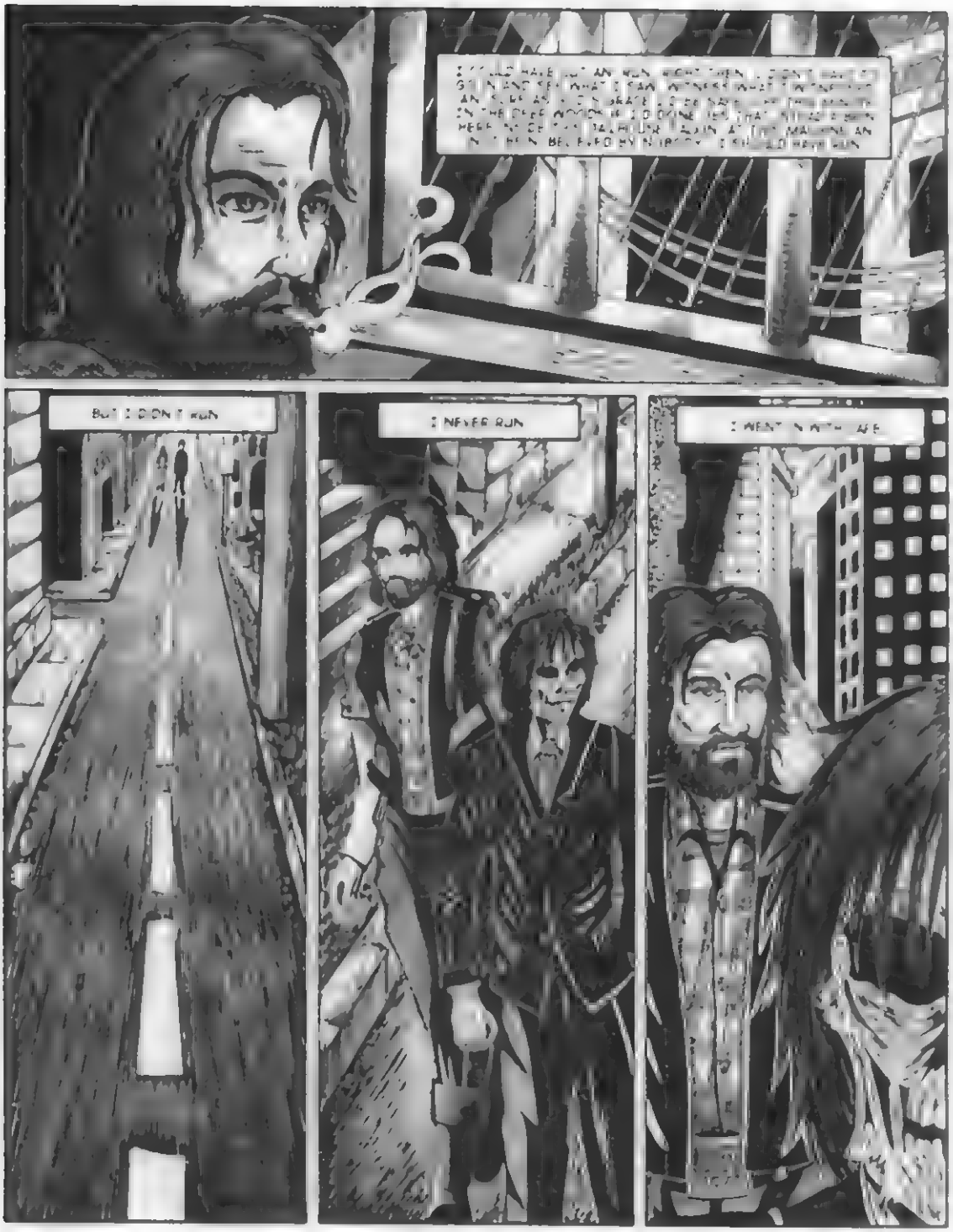


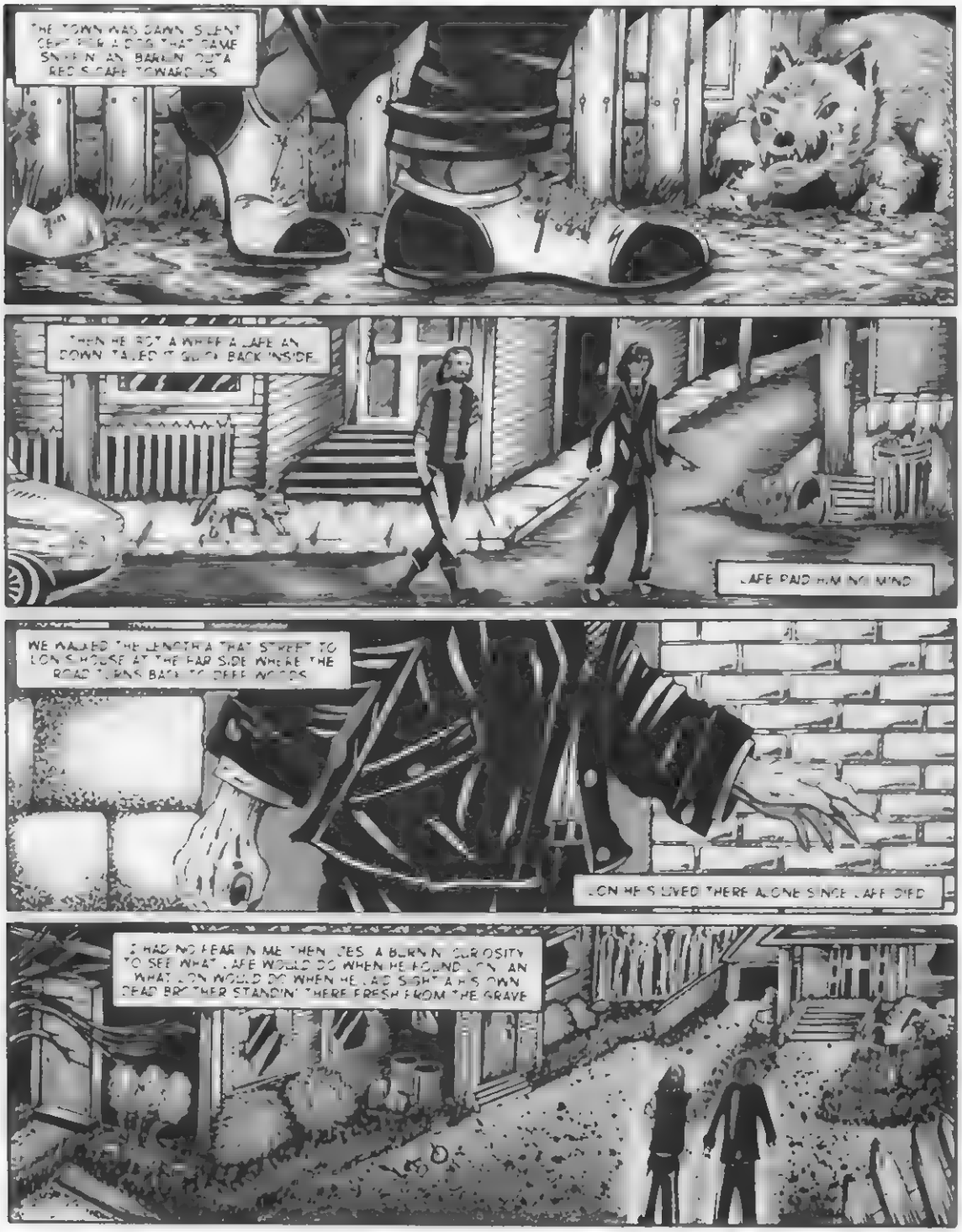



LAFE...?
OH SWEET JESUS, LAFE, YOU'RE THE FIRST LIVIN' DEAD I EVER COME ACROSS
WHAT BRUNG YA BACK?
LON...
IT'S LON I WANT TO SEE
WHERE'S LON?
TO HOME, MOST LIKELY, ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS


LON
I MUST SEE MY BROTHER LON
CAN'T SLEEP PROPER TILL I DO


WE'RE ALMOST IN TOWN LAFE.
DO YOU AIM TO WALK RIGHT DOWN THE MAIN STREET?
THAT'S WHAT I AIM TO DO
WHAT'LL FOLKS SAY SEEIN' AS HOW YOU LOOK AN' ALL? SEEIN' AS HOW THEY KNOW YOU BELONG DEAD AN' BURIED UP ON CEMETERY RIDGE?
THEY'LL BE NONE UP TO SEE THEY'LL MOST BE TO BED.
YOU INTEND TO GO STRAIGHT THROUGH TO LONS?
STRAIGHT THROUGH. THAT'S MY PROPER INTENT

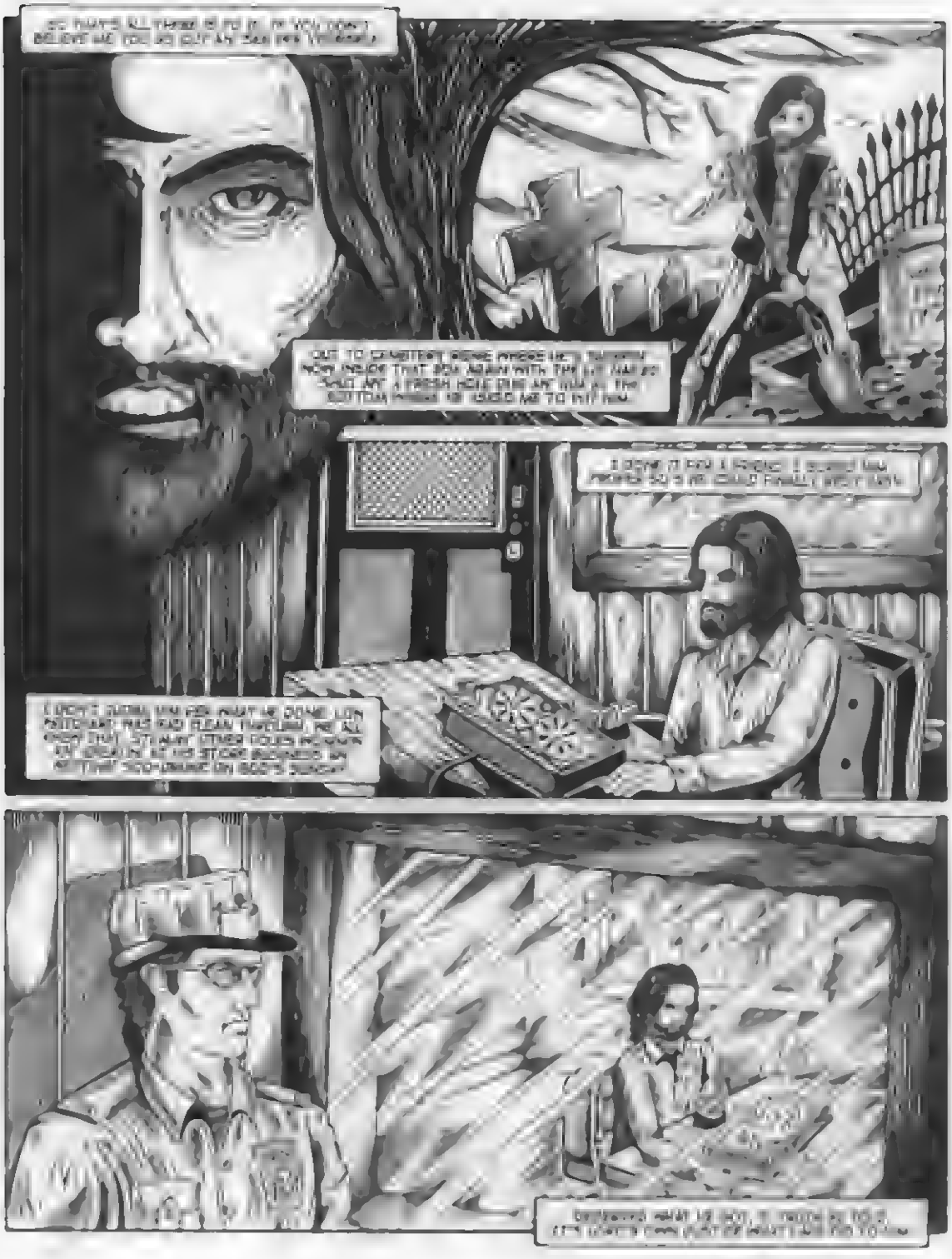

BUT I DON'T RUN
I NEVER RUN
I WENT WITH HIM


THE TOWN WAS DAMN SILENT EXCEPT FOR A DOG THAT CAME SNIFFIN' AN BARKIN' OUTA RED'S CAFE TOWARDS US
THEN HE BOT A WHEFF A JAFE AN DOWN TALED IT GUCH BACK INSIDE
JAFE PAID HIM NO MIND
WE WALKED THE LENGTH A THAT STREET TO LON'S HOUSE AT THE FAR SIDE WHERE THE ROAD TURNS BACK TO DEEP WOODS
LON HE'S LIVED THERE ALONE SINCE JAFE DIED
I HAD NO FEAR IN ME THEN JES A BURNIN CURIOSITY TO SEE WHAT JAFE WOULD DO WHEN HE FOUND LON AN WHAT LON WOULD DO WHEN HE HAD SIGHT A HIS OWN DEAD BROTHER STANDIN' THERE FRESH FROM THE GRAVE


JACE BOY IT WAS HATE THAT BRUNG LAFE HERE HATE FER LON THAT DREW HIM UP FROM THAT COFFIN TO WALK THE WOODS HERE TO FACE THE BROTHER THAT DEVILED HIS WOMAN AN' RUINT HIS LIFE AN' DROVE HIM TO FIRE THAT BULLET INTO HIS OWN HEART
HATE WAS THE BLOOD THAT FILLED LAFE PRITCHARD'S BODY THAT MORNIN HATE WAS THE COAL THAT FUELED THE RAGIN FURNACE OF HIS ANGER
LON...
WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO WHEN YOU FIND LON AT HOME?
KNOCK KNOCK!
YOU'LL SEE...


IT ALL HAPPENED FAST
HOLD YER DAMNED HORSES
LAFE ALL SMOKE OF ANY STINKIN FROM THE SUN HAVIN BEEN AT HIM
GOOD MORNIN' LON
WHAT THE..?
LAFE? JESUS CHRIST NOOOOO!!!!
LON SCREAMIN LIKE A STUCK PIG WHEN HE SEES HIS HORROR OF A BROTHER STANDIN THERE
AND ME WATCHIN THE HORROR OF IT ALL IN THAT DARK MORNIN ROOM WITH THE SHADES DOWN AN THE LIGHT STILL TRAPPED OUTSIDE
YOU AND ME GOT A SCORE TO SETTLE LITTLE BROTHER
SHIT, LAFE, WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO?


WE'RE EVEN NOW ME AN' LON
I GOT WHAT I CAME FOR
I CAN SLEEP PROPER NOW
HE OWED ME AN I COLLECTED
IT'S A FAIR TRADE




THE END

THE NUMBER 121 TO PENNSYLVANIA AND OTHERS

Kealan Patrick Burke

Kealan Patrick Burke's first collection *Ravenous Ghosts* was released in a very limited run promptly sold out and now commands high prices on the secondary market. We are very pleased to introduce you to the author's follow-up collection, an ambitious gathering of some of the tales for which he is best known.



The lonesome sound of a long forgotten train draws an old man to memories of a horrific past... A journalist makes the mistake of visiting a website where real-life executions are the order of the day. At the foot of an old tree, an insidious evil awaits two boys digging for treasure... A browbeaten salesman finds hope and a possible escape from the banality of his world when he returns home to find a fairytale beanstalk sprouting from his garden. A man resists the social pressure to quit smoking and puts himself at an unimaginable risk. A high school student accepts a dare to ask out the ugliest girl in school and enters a world of pain and violence. A bunch of buddies doomed to murder sinners get together for one last drink in a dying town.

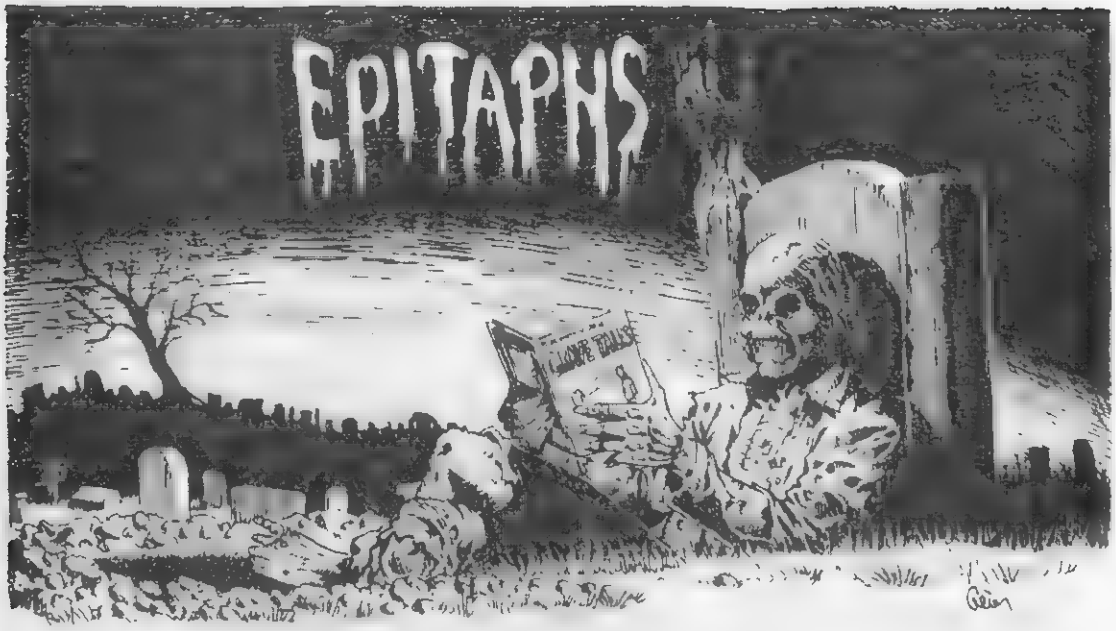
These are some of the passengers headed for a ride through the dark uncharted regions of the heart and mind on a train unbound by any law but its own.

All Aboard *The Number 121 to Pennsylvania*.

There will be no stops.

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BARGAIN BASEMENT

BY ELIZABETH MASSIE

Angela eased into her kitchen chair, dropped her elbows on the table, and stared into her cup of steaming tea. Stray bits floated in it, not tea leaves, but something that had floated in from somewhere. Strands of grainy cobwebs, maybe, dead fly legs, a dried up baby spider, whatever. It didn't really matter. She didn't much care. Life was fairly pathetic as it was, what was a floating fly leg?

She hadn't cleaned her house in months. She was too tired, too disinterested, and nobody came to visit anyway. If she had money to see a doctor, she knew she would have been told she had some form of depression. Depression or anxiety, or both, brought on by the sheer virtue of existing. She'd had her purse stolen in July. Her dishwasher had broken down in August. In September, her cat had been hit by a car. She'd gone to the SPCA for a replacement but they said they had the right to come inspect her house any time after the adoption, so she left empty-handed. She loved animals as much as anyone, but that didn't matter. They'd take a look at her unwashed windows, her grimy stove, her junk in the basement, and say what pet Nazis like those people were prone to say: *No cat for you!*

Work was barely tolerable. She clerked at the local Ace Hardware, selling hammers and nails and hinges, separating screws from the wrong bins, keeping kids from playing with garden sheers. She'd been there almost seventeen years. She'd not had a raise in twelve.

But, she thought as she looked up at the grease-iced window and at the curtains she paid fifty cents for at a garage sale last spring, *I do have my junk.*

Angela found a peaceful distraction on weekends and evenings, collecting antiques of questionable value, chipped tumblers, boxes of Avon perfumes that had gone alcohol, and other things at yard sales and flea markets. She even rummaged through alleys at night, peering into people's garbage cans and behind garages to see what might have been tossed out. She kept these things in her cellar, her "bargain basement"

as she would have jokingly called it to her friends, if she had any friends. She liked her collection of junk, and when she felt particularly bad she would go into the basement and touch them, smell them, look at them.

Angela reached out from her chair and strummed her fingers in the cool air, remembering Tinker's warm, furry head and how he would stretch up on his hind legs to get the best possible scratch. Tears suddenly burned Angela's eyes, and she let herself weep for her cat, for her stupid, broken-down dishwasher, and the life that, like the sagging sofa in the basement and the sagging skin on her face, was in great need of a major lift.

There was a groan from the basement.

Angela spun about and stared at the cellar door. Her throat went suddenly dry.

What was that?!

She waited, listened, tipping her head to hear more clearly. But there was nothing more, just the ticking of the kitchen baseboards and the humming of the clock over the sink.

"Puh, it's just this house," she told Tinker-who-was-not-there. "We've both lived here long enough to know it makes noises."

She turned back, scooped up two spoonfuls of sugar from the sugar dish, dumped it in, and stirred it. Around and around and around and around. A tiny whirlpool sucking air. She felt like that most of the time, spinning mindlessly, sucking air.

There was a loud thump and a groan below her in the basement.

Angela jumped to her feet, her teacup skittering across the tabletop and crashing to the faded linoleum tile. Her heart kicked into a mad, thundering pace. She stared, wide-eyed, at the door to the cellar.

"Oh my God oh my God!" she whispered. And then, "Oh, shit, did I remember to lock the basement door to the outside?" She couldn't remember if she had or if she hadn't. Her breath locked in her chest. Her arms were awash with cold sweat.

She snatched a frying pan from the stove top, holding it aloft as the grease she had not drained from last night's hamburgers rolled off the cast iron lip and down her arm. Stepping out of her loafers so as to make as little noise as possible, Angela tiptoed to the cellar door. *God help me, let it be nothing!*

Clenching her jaws hard enough that her eardrums crackled, Angela reached for the doorknob, turned it.

Yanked the door open.

The huge, filthy man was just on the other side of the door. He sprang at Angela with a deafening roar. Angela was knocked backward and she collided with a kitchen chair, which flew away across the room. She struck the floor on her back, hard, cracking her elbows. "Oww!" she screamed. Still clutching the pan, she rolled over just as the man leapt for her again, his hands outstretched, his yellowed teeth bared. He missed Angela's neck by a hair's breath, and she scrambled to her feet and raced around the table. She waved the frying pan at him. Grease flew like spittle.

The man clambered to his feet, wheezing, and grabbed the edge of the table and flipped it over with a grunt. He stumbled over the protruding legs, his fingers strumming the air in mad rhythms, the skin around his eyes hitching. Angela backed up against the kitchen cabinet. *Oh God oh God oh God!!*

"I'm going to fucking kill you!" the man howled.

"Oh no you're not!" Angela cried, and she brought the frying pan up, around, and into the side of the man's head as hard as she could. He stopped in his tracks, his eyes focusing on her for a moment, then rolling up to show the whites. He dropped like a sack of old potatoes.

"Oh, shit, oh." Angela dropped the pan.

Slowly, she knelt beside the man and patted his face. "You alive?" He didn't move. She thumped his check with her forefinger. "Hey, you alive?" He didn't move, or answer, but she saw his chest lifting, falling, lifting, falling beneath his grimy flannel shirt.

Angela stared at him, catching her breath and the few wits she could piece together, then found the electrical tape in the junk drawer and bound his hands and feet. She dragged the man down the basement steps by his heels, his head cracking on each and every stair. *Take that, you animal!* Angela thought, though she was still too shaky to truly enjoy the thuds.

The basement floor was concrete, cracking, and sticky. Angela maneuvered the man through her myriad, junky treasures—old desks, chests of drawers, moldy leather suitcases, boxes of jelly glasses and Christmas ornaments, towers of out-of-date encyclopedias and *National Geographics*. The man's scraggly hair caught in the floor cracks and hunks were torn out here and there.

Angela glanced at the door leading outside; it was still padlocked. A small positive, at least.

Taking a deep breath, Angela grasped the man by the pants legs and hoisted him over the splintered, wooden threshold and into the back, unfinished portion of the cellar. This tiny room had no windows, a dirt floor, a low ceiling, and musty stone walls. It smelled of mud, blood, and feces. A single, naked light bulb dangled on a chain. Angela tugged the chain. The bulb was startled into life, tossing tainted light about the floor, Angela, the unconscious brute on the floor, and the other four men chained to the long, steel bar embedded in the wall.

The men blinked at her. Their gagged mouths twitched uselessly and they flailed as best they could, being chained and all. They were different from each other, all five, with varying shades of skin color, hair color, and heights. One was close to seventy, the youngest perhaps twenty. The man who had escaped and come upstairs was a middle-aged guy, collected just last night behind the K-Mart dumpster around midnight. Like the others he was a drunk or a druggie; human junk tossed out with the rest of the garbage.

"Picked your lock, did you?" Angela asked the unconscious guy, then hauled him to the bar and chained him back, securing his hands in the cuffs, the cuffs around the steel. His head flopped to the side. "Guess I didn't cheek your pockets good enough," Angela tisked. She felt his shirt and pulled out several paperclips. "Ah, here you go." She palmed the pins. "We'll have no more of this."

To the others she said, "I'll be down later with your supper. Chicken pot pie! Mmm!"

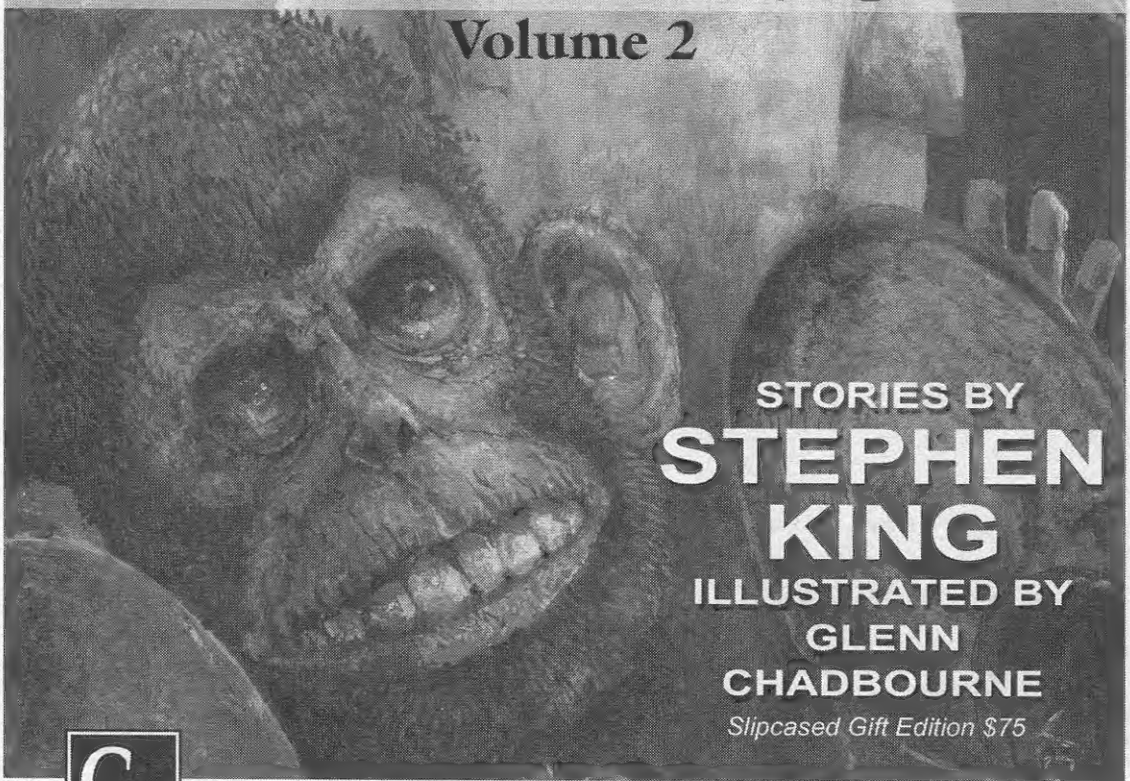
She touched, smelled, and gazed lovingly at her junk, then went out into the main room of the basement. She breathed deeply, taking in the must and the dust and the rust, then returned to the kitchen and a new cup of tea.

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BRIAN KEENE

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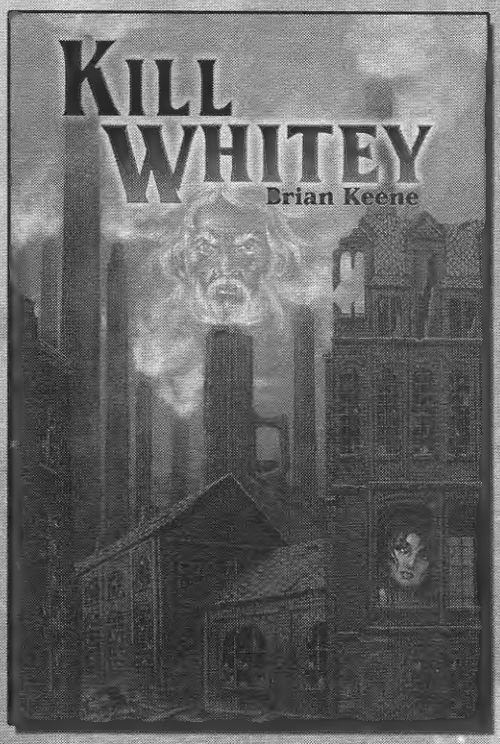
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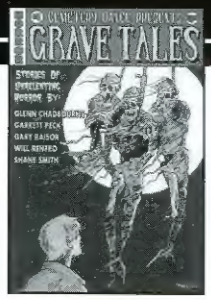
—Dave Dreher, *House of Horrors*

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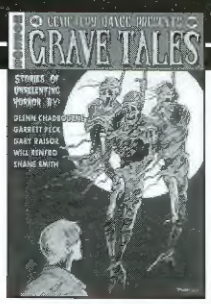
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